



*From “Wetland Program Development Grants (WPDGs) Case Studies”  
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**Baldwin County Alabama:** *Preserving valuable wetland resources in the face of  
development demands of an increasing population*

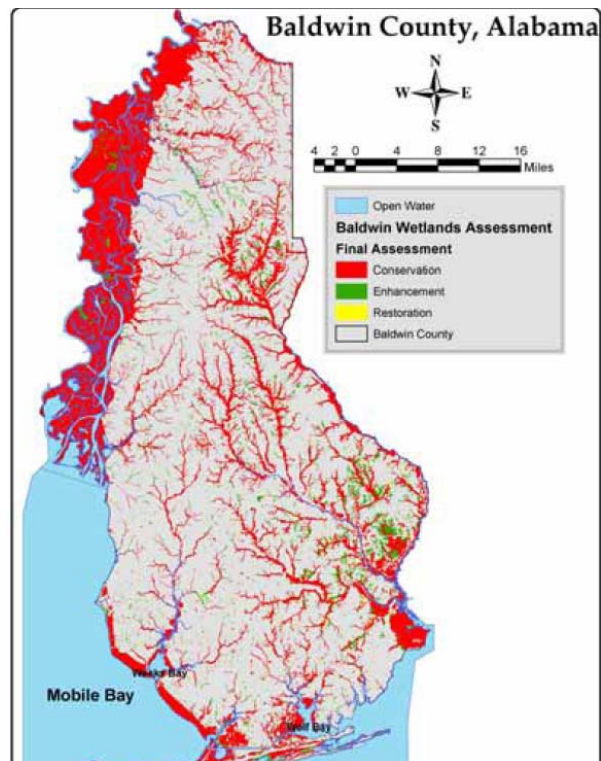
**Introduction**

Baldwin County is located in southern Alabama on the shores of Mobile Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. The county encompasses an area around 1600 square miles with wetlands covering over a quarter of that area. The largest threat to wetland resources is development. The county’s population has grown over 40% since 1990 and remains on the top-three list of the fastest growing counties in Alabama. Given these challenges, Baldwin County is endeavoring to achieve balance between development needs of the growing population and protection of valuable wetland resources.

The Baldwin County Advance Identification Project (ADID) jump-started wetland protection efforts in the county by locating, identifying and assessing wetland resources in an area of southern Baldwin County. This combined effort of the Baldwin County Commission (BCC), Alabama Department of Environmental Management and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency allowed regulators to make more informed management decisions.

**WPDG Activity**

In an effort to build on the work of the ADID project, BCC applied for and received a WPDG in 1999 to support expansion of the initial project’s goals to include all of Baldwin County. The WPDG project, entitled the “Baldwin County Wetland Conservation Plan (BCWCP)” had a goal of identifying, assessing and restoring wetlands throughout the county. Organizing the conservation plan into major tasks with specific objectives enabled BCC to address several important aspects of their wetland program. The four major project tasks under BCWCP were 1) to develop a Wetland Protection Overlay District (WPOD) to incorporate in the Baldwin County Zoning Regulations; 2) to develop a GIS wetland data layer with information on the location, type and functional capacity of wetlands in Baldwin County; 3) to develop a wetlands education and outreach program for area



\* Map of countywide functional assessment results. Adapted from the “Baldwin County Wetland Conservation Plan” (published by the Baldwin County Planning and Zoning Department in May 2005).

stakeholders; and 4) to research, design and demonstrate wetland restoration/construction projects at selected sites throughout the County. Taken together, these tasks formed a comprehensive wetland strategy for Baldwin County.

BCC reached several major milestones within each project area during the 4-year time frame of the conservation plan. For example, BCC created and included a WPOD in the Regulations (see §24.4 of the Baldwin County, Alabama zoning regulations) and added wetland protection provisions, including isolated waters, to the Baldwin County Subdivision Regulations. BCC also created the Baldwin County Digital Wetland Layer and validated computer generated maps through field assessments of location, wetland determination and digital photography for 138 randomly selected sites. In addition, they developed the Remote Functional Wetland Assessment Model which, within the watershed context, identified 88% (260,000 acres) of the wetland polygons assessed as suitable for conservation, 10% (30,000 acres) suitable for enhancement and 2% suitable for restoration. BCC kept area stakeholders informed about Conservation Plan goals and newly developed products by holding public meetings and presentations throughout the process. They also distributed wetland maps and had periodic newspaper coverage to increase public awareness and enthusiasm for project activities. BCC addressed their final BCWCP project area by demonstrating a shoreline wetland restoration project utilizing innovative methods to reduce the impact of high energy waves and conducting post-construction surveys to assess success.

Though BCWCP was completed in September '03, its achievements are ongoing in the county's wetland protection efforts and many of the technical resources developed through the project will be valuable for years to come.

### **Current Work and Future Plans**

Baldwin County Commission is utilizing another WPDG to improve communication regarding the wetland data with other interested stakeholders. The main objective of this wetland effort is to distribute and make readily available digital and hard copy data illustrating wetland location (including a remote functional assessment analysis), watershed boundaries (including sub basins), impaired waters, and land usages for areas of interest. In addition, wetland and watershed protection ordinances are currently being developed which advocate increased protection at the county and municipal levels. To date, much has been accomplished and Baldwin County's wetland protection efforts continue to gain momentum in the wake of the recent hurricane events and increased development pressures.

For more information about Baldwin County Alabama or the Baldwin County Wetland Conservation Plan, please visit the County website (<http://www.co.baldwin.al.us/>).

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